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AUTHOR Kelley, H. Paul; Koch, William R.
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ABSTRACT

Some issues of concern to administrators of measurement service centers in most campus settings are discussed. Goal setting is an important factor in managing the development of a measurement organization. Goals may be categorized as immediate, long term, or probably unattainable. All types are useful and should be formally identified and categorized. Well established goals can provide the basis for decision making and planning for an organization's development. Basic goals provide guidance and security for subordinates to exercise authority, as well as to develop personal responsibility for the quality of services provided. Four areas of concern are identified and discussed: (1) The measurement office provides academic services, student services, and service to the institution's administration; which service should be emphasized; (2) Should the measurement office be content with providing services or determine the degree of user education necessary; (3) What should be the range and extent of services provided; and (4) Should a fee schedule for services rendered be developed. Strategies to increase the visibility and impact of the measurement office and enhance its influence and reputation are suggested. (DWH)

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H. Paul Kelley and William R. Koch

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This paper was prepared for presentation in a symposium of the Measurement Services Association entitled "Characteristics of an Ideal Measurement Service," at the annual meeting of the National Council on Measurement in Education, New Orleans, LA, April 25, 1984. The authors are director and associate director, respectively, of the Measurement and Evaluation Center at The University of Texas at Austin, where Dr. Kelley is also a professor and Dr. Koch an assistant professor of educational psychology.

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MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION CENTER
The University of Texas at Austin

MANAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEASUREMENT SERVICES OFFICES: ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

H. Paul Kelley and William R. Koch

Tremendous diversity characterizes centers for test scoring and measurement services on campuses across the country. Some offices are one-person operations, others are developing gradually, and a relatively small number are large and well-established. Regardless of their size and status, however--and often in the face of a considerable number of obstacles--all want to improve the quality and expand the range of the services they provide.

The development of a center or office of measurement services is quite naturally affected by such external influences on campus as reorganizations, changes in enrollment, budget fluctuations, and revisions of administrative policy. As the old saying goes, the only constant seems to be change. And yet, if ample thought is given to the establishment of basic goals and to long-range planning directed toward accomplishing those goals, the director or manager of a measurement center can maintain substantial control over its development.

The major purpose of this paper is to discuss briefly some of the issues confronting administrators of measurement services centers in most campus settings. Many of these issues are multifaceted; some are interrelated. In order to provide the proper perspective for addressing the issues, however, it is necessary first to emphasize the key role that goal setting can play in managing the development of a measurement organization.

Goal Setting

Basic goals exist in at least three forms: (a) goals that are already being met and that should continue to be met on a day-to-day basis, (b) goals that might be within reach through long-term, diligent effort, and (c) goals that probably can never be attained completely. All three types are useful for a measurement office, and they should be formally identified and properly categorized by the director.

Goals presently being met can serve as minimal criteria of acceptable performance in the daily operations of the center. An example would be the goal of providing one-day turnaround for scoring and item analysis of test answer sheets received for scanning.

Goals that may be attainable in the near future can function both as motivators and, once accomplished, as milestones of achievement. Also, they can provide the basis for the development of long-range plans. An example of such a goal would be to develop, publicize, and implement a campus-wide service for computerized item banking and test construction.

Goals that, realistically, may never be reached can be invaluable because they constitute ideals toward which the measurement office should strive. As ideals, they can serve as guiding principles when important decisions must be made or when significant changes that affect the office occur. An example of this type of goal would be to institute a system for obtaining student evaluations of teaching that is accepted and endorsed enthusiastically by faculty, students, and administrators alike.

The processes of setting basic goals and reviewing them periodically are equally important both to the small, growing measurement office and to the large, well-established one. The difference is one of quantity or magnitude of goals, not of kind. The goals of a small office may be much more modest and less diverse than those of a large center, but they are essential, nonetheless, if the director is to maintain control over future development.

Being preoccupied with the daily struggle for recognition and survival, the director of a small office may never give much thought to the process of formally defining goals; also, goals may seem to be vague or unrealistic, more appropriate for the distant future than for the very real present. Directors of established centers, in contrast, often consider their center's goals to be obvious and tend to take them for granted; unfortunately, because effective communication may suffer as the organization grows and forms subareas, the center's goals may not be self-evident to individual staff members.

The goal-setting process is an ideal exercise for a staff development or in-service workshop; it could offer at least the following benefits: (a) it can be conducted in one day's time, (b) it has a clear start and finish, (c) it can produce tangible outcomes, (d) it provides the opportunity for staff members from different functional areas of the center to interact and, thereby, to gain a better appreciation for each other's problems, (e) it opens lines of communication among staff members at all levels of the organization, and (f) it promotes the interchange of ideas, gripes, concerns, and opinions. To be effective, it is extremely important that the goal-setting process be a democratic one rather than being one in which goals are imposed from the top down. Staff members at all levels should participate in establishing the three types of goals. In the process of defining the organization's goals and establishing their priorities, staff members tend to develop a common sense of purpose despite their diverse functions. As a consequence, they are more likely to internalize the goals and carry them over into their job performance.

Perhaps the most beneficial aspect of having well-established goals for the measurement office is that they can provide the basis for decision making and for charting desired courses for the organization's development. A director confronted with a difficult decision will find the decision easier to make because of the guidance provided by goals. Decisions made over time also tend to be more consistent. A related advantage is that it is easier for the director to delegate authority effectively and for subordinates to exercise the authority because they can rely on the basic goals for guidance and security (i.e., the subordinates can be confident that the manager will approve of the actions they take). Another benefit of keeping the organization's basic goals at the forefront of staff members' attention is that the urgency of daily crises tends to be de-emphasized and placed into proper perspective. Finally, the establishment of basic goals helps staff members to develop personal responsibility for the quality of the services provided by the measurement office; they know what the office is trying to accomplish and can act accordingly. For all of these reasons, the importance of goal setting cannot be over-emphasized.

Typical Issues

Four of the issues confronting administrators of measurement services will be discussed.

1. Should the measurement office emphasize the provision of academic services, or should student services be the primary concern? What role does service to the institution's administration play?

The basic services provided by the measurement office are dictated to some extent by where it is located in the organizational structure of the college or university; the measurement office may be in the student services division, the academic division, or the administrative division. In setting priorities, therefore, the office should first be concerned with accomplishing the tasks for which it has responsibility within its own division. However, the director should not feel constrained to perform services exclusively within that division because excellent opportunities for increased visibility and funding may exist in providing services that cross divisional boundaries.

A measurement office typically provides services in at least three major areas: processing classroom multiple-choice tests, administering the local system for obtaining student evaluations of teaching, and serving as the primary agent for anything related to national standardized testing programs. In performing this last function, the measurement office provides the interface among students, academic departments, and administrative units such as the admissions office and the registrar's office. Depending on the way that services are organized on a campus, however, many other service possibilities exist. For example, the measurement office might be involved in providing career guidance services, psychological testing and counseling services, data processing and computing services, learning and study skills services, faculty development services, survey research, program evaluation, and institutional studies.

Generally speaking, testing and measurement personnel are most experienced and qualified in academically related areas rather than in the areas of student affairs or institutional administration. Traditionally, test scoring and item analysis services have been associated primarily with

academic achievement and aptitude testing. Many of the testing services provided will involve both national and local aptitude and achievement tests used in connection with admissions and with academic placement and credit by examination. Given a choice, therefore, it seems preferable that the measurement office be made a part of the academic branch of the university structure, reporting either directly to the president or to the provost or vice-president for academic affairs; if there is more than one academic dean, it would be better for the office to report to the same person to whom those deans report, rather than being under one of the co-equal deans. Major advantages of such an organizational structure are that faculty members almost always attach more importance to academic units than to student services units, and they almost always trust academic units more than they do administrative units.

Establishing the center as an academic unit promotes effective working relations with the faculty, but it in no way precludes providing services both to the students and to the administration. Students will contact the measurement office for matters concerning admission testing, academic placement testing, and testing for credit by examination. Administrative units will consult the measurement office about document scanning, data analysis, program evaluation, and institutional studies related to test scores. It is the conviction of the authors that identification of the measurement office primarily with the academic units of the college or university constitutes the best of all possible worlds--there are many advantages and no serious disadvantages.

2. To what extent should the measurement office be content with providing services, and to what extent should efforts be made to educate the users it serves?

A good rule-of-thumb is to devote as much time and effort to education of users as possible. Both the credibility and the reputation of the center will be enhanced by this investment; also, it can result in less misuse and misinterpretation of the output generated by the measurement office, especially that which is statistical in nature. Providing education also presents the opportunity to enlighten users about the complexity of the numbers that appear on statistical summaries and about the large amount of work necessary to produce the reports.

When faculty members come to the measurement office for test scoring and item analysis services, a good opportunity presents itself to educate them about test construction, score interpretation, and grading practices. It is widely acknowledged that the quality of faculty testing practices is extremely variable, nor is it reasonable to expect that faculty members, who have received little if any instruction in proper testing practices, will demonstrate sound measurement techniques. When it comes to testing, most faculty members simply do to their students what was done to them when they were students. An educational program organized by the measurement office can make a substantial contribution in upgrading the overall quality of faculty testing practices.

3. What should be the range and the extent of services provided by the measurement office?

No measurement center has unlimited resources on which to draw in providing services to users. All face budget, personnel, and time constraints that make it necessary to allocate resources effectively to optimize the services provided by the center. One important problem facing the director is to resolve the conflicting aims of offering both breadth and depth of services. The resolution involves the familiar approach of analyzing the tradeoff between providing the broadest possible range of services and performing each service comprehensively.

One useful technique is to define a minimal set of services that should be provided routinely as part of the basic functions of the measurement office. In the realm of testing, the basic list should include document scanning, test scoring, reporting of test results (including student rosters, score distributions, and simple descriptive statistics), item analysis summaries, and administrative services for standardized admission tests, placement tests, and tests for credit by examination. With the recent widespread availability of personal computers, another desirable service is to write classroom test scanning results directly onto floppy disks that can be delivered to the instructor; the disks make it possible for the instructor to use the computerized grade-book software available for micros to maintain test score records and to submit them to various statistical analyses. In other measurement areas, the minimal set of services should probably include

consultation about questionnaire design and survey research as well as administration of the local program for obtaining student evaluations of teaching.

Any services beyond the basic set should be provided only within the limitations of the available resources of the office; in making these determinations, staff members must always keep in mind the goals toward which the office aspires. For example, if a major goal is to increase the funds available to the center, services should be provided that are in demand and that are easily marketed for a fee. If a major goal is to enhance the reputation of the measurement office as a research organization, then efforts should be directed toward securing research grants or contracts whose successful completion would demonstrate and publicize research competence.

4. Which services should be provided at no cost to the user, and for which services should the user be charged a fee?

The answer to this question, of course, depends once again on how the measurement office fits into the organizational structure of a particular college or university. If the office is supported by funds obtained directly from student tuition and fees, for example, then services to students should be provided free of charge. It would be quite appropriate in such a situation, however, to charge faculty members fees for scanning documents in connection with their research projects. If funds are allocated by the president for the purpose of obtaining scanning services for the registrar's office, it is simply a bookkeeping decision as to whether the funds should be allocated directly to the measurement office or to the registrar, who will then "pay" for the scanning. If the measurement office is funded as part of the academic division, then it should routinely provide classroom test scoring services at no cost to departments. Departments usually have few, if any, funds available to pay for such services; the measurement office should seek to promote, not discourage, the use of its services in order to improve testing practices on the campus.

Most measurement offices obtain some of their funds directly from the institution's budget and some from fees paid by users. Among all of the various services a measurement office provides, document scanning services are typically the most easily marketed because they tend to be always in demand. No matter how sophisticated computing and data processing have

become, they still require that data be entered into the computer, and document scanning usually is cheaper and faster than data entry operators. Not every data entry application can be handled most efficiently with scanning, however, but many can.

The measurement office should always be on the lookout for potential scanning applications, particularly for administrative units such as the admissions office, registrar's office, and business office. Charging fees for scanning should be considered reasonable whenever the scanner is performing work that otherwise would require payments for data entry or keypunching. Also, it is usually possible to extend the scanner's working hours beyond the normal eight-hour office day to accommodate increased workloads at relatively little extra expense.

Unfortunately, some measurement offices are forced to survive entirely on a self-supporting basis. Without the luxury of institutionally allocated funds, such an office must cater to almost every imaginable source of income, including outside government and other non-profit agencies, and even private businesses. In these instances, the ideal is to generate as much income as possible from a few dependable, large-volume tasks in order to subsidize other less profitable services that the office wishes to provide.

Useful Strategies

Turning now to useful strategies, it should be no surprise that publicity and communication are necessary to increase the visibility and impact of the measurement office. An office can use the simple vehicle of a campus-wide testing and measurement newsletter to publicize its services and expertise. Another very effective technique is to develop a series of brief handouts dealing with measurement topics that are timely, of interest, and useful to faculty members; for example, discussions of the following topics would be appropriate: the relative pros and cons of multiple-choice and essay test questions, grading practices, ways to prevent cheating on tests, principles of proper test construction, development of instructional objectives, the meaning of item analysis results, and the issues involved in student evaluations of teaching. Handouts can be especially valuable when distributed to users as they pick up their classroom test results and their teaching

evaluation results. In this same vein, workshops can be developed and offered to faculty members, such as sessions on how to write effective multiple-choice and essay questions, how to use item analysis data to improve classroom tests, issues involved in grading student performance, and ways to use results from student evaluations to improve teaching.

Because much of the business of the typical measurement office involves interactions with students, faculty members, and administrative personnel, it is crucial that the office employ staff members with good interpersonal skills. The staff members must be perceived as people who care and who help. If it is possible, it will be extremely helpful for one or more professional members of the measurement office staff to hold academic, tenure-track rank and to teach on a part-time basis. Such status promotes the credibility of the office in working with other faculty members both individually and as members of committees.

Another strategy that enhances the influence and the reputation of the measurement office is to serve as a source and dispenser of information about the institution. Through access to test scores and other computer-stored institutional data, the measurement office can generate information useful to the president and other administrators, faculty committees, academic deans and department chairmen, high school counselors, parents, prospective students, enrolled students, alumni, and the general public. A measurement office can make effective use of an advisory committee of faculty members--if possible, one of the standing faculty committees that is concerned with academic policies. The measurement office should prepare, publish, and distribute widely on campus its research bulletins and technical reports; typically, these publications will derive from the office's validity studies, research activities, program evaluation projects, and institutional studies. Measurement office staff members should become familiar and keep up-to-date with the activities of faculty governance groups such as the faculty senate and standing committees of the faculty; those groups are eager consumers of institutional information. The agency that issues institutional news releases is another eager consumer of such data; its releases will usually identify the measurement office as the source of the information.

Probably the most useful tactic available for a measurement office to increase its financial support is to create demands for services that it can provide. The basic strategy is first to identify a function that the office could perform--either a new service or one presently being performed less well by another agency. Next, the administrators in relevant units of the college or university must be persuaded to allow the measurement office to perform the function on a pilot or trial basis. To offer to conduct the trial at no additional cost to the administrators can be a helpful tactic. Assuming that the office is able to demonstrate a strong performance record, a dependency will be created. With luck and persistence, financial support usually will follow to ensure that the service will continue to be performed. This strategy will work particularly well when the function is one in which increased efficiency is likely to be noticed by top-level administrators.

Several final cautions: Because the measurement office is frequently involved in the administration of various testing and evaluation endeavors on campus, a tendency may develop for faculty members and students to view the office as an adversary rather than an ally. Also, it is easy for staff members of the measurement center to become so caught up in the enforcement of policies, procedures, and regulations that they lose sight of the goals of the center and why they have their jobs! They may need to be reminded occasionally that the measurement office exists to serve people in the academic community: faculty, students, and other administrators. If the measurement office is to maintain its credibility and good reputation, its services must be provided with quality, accuracy, and on time, but, above all, with enthusiasm and courtesy.